

VZCZCXRO7065
PP RUEHMA RUEHPA
DE RUEHUJA #0293/01 0441455
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 131455Z FEB 08
FM AMEMBASSY ABUJA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2083
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RUEHOS/AMCONSUL LAGOS 8733
RHEBAAA/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE
RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 ABUJA 000293

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR G/TIP, DRL, PRM, AF/W, INR/AA
ENERGY FOR CAROLYN GAY

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREF](#) [PHUM](#) [KWMN](#) [ELAB](#) [SMIG](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: AMBASSADOR LAGON'S VISIT TO ABUJA

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: During a January 22 visit to Abuja, Ambassador-at-Large for Trafficking and Director of the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking, Mark Lagon, emphasized the importance of increased prosecutions of traffickers, the protection of victims, and the prevention of human trafficking. Ambassador Lagon met with officials from the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), the Minister of Labor, the Chief Justice of Nigeria, representatives from the Ministry of Women's Affairs, the American Bar Association Africa Initiative (ABA-Africa), and representatives of international non-governmental organizations working on trafficking issues in Nigeria. Discussions highlighted the need for increased capacity in the judiciary, technical assistance for investigators and prosecutors, stronger punishment for perpetrators, and the political will to encourage the GON to allocate more resources for the protection and rehabilitation of victims of trafficking. END SUMMARY.

NAPTIP

¶2. (U) During a roundtable discussion with key members of NAPTIP -- including Executive Secretary Carol Ndaguba; Director of Investigations Muhammad Babandede; Director of Prosecutions Shada Haruna; and Director of Public Enlightenment Olufunmiladun Aiyegbusi -- Ambassador Lagon praised the GON as a role model for establishing NAPTIP, making Nigeria the only African country with an agency dedicated to combating trafficking in persons. Ambassador Lagon then inquired about the challenges NAPTIP faces in prosecuting and convicting alleged traffickers. Babandede said that lack of funding for investigators to gather evidence creates an obstacle for prosecutors. Babandede explained how exploitation must be clearly evident to prove someone is guilty of trafficking because Nigerian judges are reluctant to convict unless a victim had already reached the destination and was forced into prostitution or domestic slavery. Adding to the difficulty is the requirement for victims to testify in person, which often does not occur due to fear of retribution. Cultural traditions in Nigeria also contribute to the problem. Most parents are willing to send their children off in search of a better life and do not realize the conditions in which their children will end up.

¶3. (U) Societal attitude is still a major obstacle in the fight against human trafficking according to Ndaguba. The judiciary and other law enforcement agencies do not always

understand that human trafficking is a real problem. She said that NAPTIP is sometimes referred to as the agency that "pesters prostitutes." Haruna explained that although NAPTIP works in coordination with the Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS) and Nigerian Police Force (NPF), there is some resentment toward NAPTIP for taking work and credit away from other law enforcement agencies when arrests or rescues happen. Babandede acknowledged that NAPTIP needs to give more credit to NIS and NPF for the work they do. Ambassador Lagon inquired about what the USG could do to build political will within the GON to take a tougher stance on trafficking and provide additional resources for the protection and rehabilitation of victims. Ndaguba suggested more advocacy from the USG and messages delivered to President Yar'Adua and members of the National Assembly. (Note: Ndaguba mentioned U.S. Representative Chris Smith's (D-NJ) visit and subsequent letter to the former administration requesting the dedication of more resources to anti-trafficking efforts. End Note.)

MINISTRY OF LABOR

¶4. (U) Minister of Labor, Dr. Hassan Muhammad Lawal, took his meeting with Ambassador Lagon as an opportunity to express his concerns about the ill treatment of Nigerian migrants by foreign governments. The Minister said that people should not be treated like criminals for seeking a better life. Ambassador Lagon agreed but added that people who exploit others with promises of a better life and then force them into servitude or prostitution need to be punished. Noting that poverty and illiteracy are key factors, Lawal acknowledged child labor as a serious issue in Nigeria, but said that in many cases parents willingly send their children away with strangers thinking they will be provided education

ABUJA 00000293 002 OF 003

and jobs. As families grow and parents are unable to feed their children, they believe they are doing the right thing by sending the children away to work or go to school. Lawal emphasized the need to create more awareness among families, especially in the rural areas, and to educate them on the realities of trafficking. The Minister also said that more resources, an increase in personnel, and additional training were needed for the Ministry to monitor the entire country adequately.

MINISTRY OF WOMEN'S AFFAIRS

¶5. (U) Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Women's Affairs, Y.N. Giwa told Ambassador Lagon that the Ministry has the mandate to coordinate all activity concerning women and children and that the priorities in combating trafficking are sensitization and advocacy, especially in local government areas. Director of Women's Affairs, Maimuna Nasir Ajanah, reinforced the fact that lack of education (for girls in particular) and poverty are the leading causes of trafficking in Nigeria. In response to Ambassador Lagon's query about the steps needed to eliminate trafficking, Deputy Director of Child Development for the Ministry, Macjohn Nwaobiala, stated that the National Assembly must begin to appreciate the magnitude of the problem in order to increase available resources. Nwaobiala further explained that the judiciary, in addition to becoming more conversant on the laws relating to child labor and trafficking, must deliver harsher sentencing in order to deter perpetrators and crack down on recruiters.

¶6. (U) Ambassador Lagon asked about the Ministry's efforts in regards to combating trafficking. According to Giwa, the Ministry works closely with NAPTIP, labor organizations, local faith based groups, and NGOs such as Women Trafficking and Child Labor Eradication Foundation (WOTCLEF) on rehabilitation programs and shelters. Giwa said the Ministry also coordinates regional efforts to establish community committees geared towards the empowerment of young people and

organizes a children's newsletter to educate young people about the perils of trafficking. When asked by Ambassador Lagon what the USG could do to help, Giwa suggested capacity building in the judiciary, technical assistance for law enforcement, and stronger advocacy on behalf of their efforts to convince the government and legislature to dedicate more resources to anti-trafficking efforts.

ABA - AFRICA

¶7. (U) Reed Slack, Chief of Party for ABA-Africa, shared with Ambassador Lagon his views on the biggest challenges Nigeria faces in dealing with trafficking. Slack said that trafficking is both a cultural and economic issue. Due to the endemic poverty, many young people feel they have no other alternatives to migrating and are easily deceived into believing they will be better off wherever they go. Slack also explained that it is culturally acceptable for children to be sent away to live with extended family members in different cities or countries. Unfortunately, these same family members often end up selling the young children or forcing them into prostitution, domestic servitude, or street hawking.

¶8. (SBU) Ambassador Lagon inquired about the capacity and capability of the different agencies working on trafficking issues. According to Slack, there needs to be more coordination amongst government ministries, law enforcement agencies, NGO's, and the international community in order to fight trafficking adequately. He also confirmed the need for capacity building within the judiciary and technical assistance for law enforcement agencies. Slack further stressed the need for a country-wide survey to collect real data that reflect the gravity and specifics of the trafficking problem in Nigeria. Slack also described the database project ABA is implementing for USAID which will provide a single source of information for all agencies and parties involved in anti-trafficking efforts.

INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

ABUJA 00000293 003 OF 003

¶9. (U) Representatives from the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the International Labor Organization (ILO), and the ECOWAS TIP Division joined Ambassadors Sanders and Lagon for a working lunch to discuss ideas for advancing the fight against human trafficking. Both representatives from the ILO and ECOWAS highlighted the need for a national action plan formulated by the federal government. All were in agreement that a strong and specific directive from the President would motivate relative agencies, the judiciary, and the legislature to begin actively working on anti-trafficking issues in a cohesive manner. Ambassador Sanders suggested that the new administration may not realize the need for a national action plan and that all parties involved should make the effort to reintroduce the issue with the federal government. Ambassador Sanders also said she would discuss trafficking in persons with the First Lady of Nigeria in a future meeting, as the First Lady is creating an NGO that deals with women's issues, healthcare, and education.

CHIEF JUSTICE OF NIGERIA

¶10. (U) In a joint meeting with the Chief Justice of Nigeria, Idris Kutigi, and representatives from the National Judicial Institute (NJI), Ambassador Lagon pressed for more convictions of perpetrators of trafficking, harsher sentencing, and stricter enforcement of punishment. Administrator of NJI, Mr. T.A. Oyeyipo, told the Chief Justice that judges need to better understand the concept of trafficking and how it differs from smuggling. Members of

NJI also said that reform is needed in the way victims and evidence are handled. Due to the difficulty in getting victims to testify in person, NJI suggested video conferencing or taped statements be admitted into evidence.

11. (U) Ambassador Lagon has cleared this cable.
SANDERS